

MID-HUDSON DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE TEMPLATE

BASIC INFORMATION

Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) Region: Mid-Hudson

Municipality Name: Town of Harrison

Downtown Name: Harrison Central Business District

County: Westchester

Downtown Description - Provide an overview of the downtown and summarize the rationale behind nominating this downtown for a Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) award):

The Town/Village of Harrison is a suburban community, located in east-central Westchester County, about 23 miles north of New York City. Harrison is spread over an area of more than 11,000 acres in a key location with regard to regional transportation routes. The combination of three interstate highways, the Hutchinson River Parkway, the Metro-North Railroad and the Westchester County Airport makes the community among the most accessible in Westchester County and contributes to the high value of its real estate. Harrison's downtown is only a 35-40 minute train ride to Manhattan, which makes it an attractive location for city commuters.

Harrison's Central Business District (CBD) serves four important functions at present including acting as the center for municipal government and the location of many community facilities and services; as a commuter transportation center; as an important housing resource offering a range of housing types; and as the largest retail area in the town. The CBD is characterized by a range of residential, retail, restaurants, mixed commercial, parking lots, institutional, industrial uses and parks. In relation to layout there are three distinct areas based upon current land use parameters. These include the area north of Halstead Avenue, containing the town hall, the library, recreation center, parking lots and Ma Riis Park; the area east of Oakland Avenue which is characterized by industrial, mixed commercial, preserved open space and a recreational facility; and the central spine of the downtown which runs east to west along Halstead Avenue and serves a mixed use "Main Street," while being bisected by the Metro-North Railroad. The railroad presents a place-making barrier to the future success of the CBD as Harrison Avenue is the only corridor which provides for north-south connectivity beyond the Metro-North overpass.

Despite its physical attributes, Harrison's Downtown lacks accessibility, variety, and an overall sense of place. As such, the Town would like to pursue a number of projects that will help to reduce and eliminate these issues and complement current investment to spur future growth. These projects include the following actions:

1. Zoning Code Regulations Planning and Implementation

The Town of Harrison will prepare a zoning code regulations planning report, which will foster the creation and implementation of zoning ordinance amendments to implement the recommendations of the Master Plan of the Town of Harrison regarding the CBD. This will update and address downtown strategies and policies related to economic development and

community revitalization. This report will provide for a comprehensive planning strategy to support the future development of downtown Harrison.

The Town's Master Plan highlights a number of strategies and policies which would benefit the growth and sustainability of the central business district, but these can only be implemented through revised Town zoning and development regulations. Accordingly, ordinance amendments will be designed to support new business, foster growth and increase the attraction of the downtown. As a part of this project, the Town will determine if the current zoning standards and development regulations should be revised or updated to promote sustainable development, including new design standards. Also, the Town will evaluate whether or not current zoning regulations in the downtown adequately supports the commercial character of the CBD, current development and provides for new opportunities for future growth. The Town will then implement the recommendations of the plan, in order to foster a number of innovative paths towards revitalization.

2. Creation of a formalized "Harrison Town Green"

Harrison's Downtown currently lacks a sense of place. As a result, it is imperative that the Town take the lead by supporting innovative place-making projects which link a number of existing assets. Currently, our retail center is separated from what is considered a public service sector, bisected by our Metro-North Train Station. Ma Riis Park lies adjacent to the entrance to the train station and Harrison Town Hall. Conceptually, the Town would like to convert the park from being an underutilized parcel of open space to an official Town Green. Town Greens continue to serve as physical, spiritual and economic centers throughout New England, and Harrison would like re-energize this concept to support the growth of its downtown. The Town envisions the "Harrison Town Green" as a public gathering place with many events, markets and exhibits. When combined with a number of critical accessibility improvements, the "Harrison Town Green" will create a gathering place for members of the public who are utilizing the downtown and all of its public facilities. This vision will engage residents, business owners and other stakeholders in order to create a new public space that reflects the community's past, present and future.

3. Accessibility Planning and Infrastructure Improvements

As one of the oldest communities in New York State, Harrison has grown into a layout that is not ideal for economic development. Harrison was established in 1696 by John Harrison, who was given 24 hours to ride his horse around an area which would become his, to fill a commitment the King had to him. Because Harrison had to travel by horse, the town contains no waterways that could not be forded on horseback. The town gets its name from Mr. Harrison, and was incorporated as a town on March 7, 1788, by an act of the New York State legislature. In fact, before the arrival of a Metro-North Railroad Station in 1870, the Town of Harrison primarily acted as a farming community. This has handicapped the creation of an ideal layout for a thriving downtown over time, and caused the creation of a number of existing accessibility issues. As referenced, Harrison's downtown originally grew because its location supported economic activity adjacent to a railway station. At the time, most economic activity grew along Halstead and Harrison Avenues, whose natural topography fell lower than the land to the north of the station. Over time, a host of public facilities were placed to the north of the tracks, resulting in the rail line acting as a barrier for pedestrians. In order to complement a major

Transit-Oriented Development which is underway, the Town would like to create and act upon a downtown accessibility plan which will provide for new pathways from the existing public facilities and what is to be a Town Green, across the tracks to Halstead Avenue.

4. Streetscape Improvements along Halstead and Harrison Avenues

The Town of Harrison is proposing the creation and implementation of a downtown streetscape plan, in order to incorporate a number of important beautification improvements throughout downtown Harrison. The project will build upon the existing streetscape along Halstead and Harrison Avenues to address the deficiencies in accessibility and beautification throughout the corridor, in order to complement accessibility improvements which will ease pedestrian access throughout the downtown. As the downtown seeks to increase pedestrian traffic, the scope will include the installation of new lighting, curbing, paving, crosswalks, sidewalks and facility connections. Furthermore, streetscape beautification will include the installation of new energy-efficient decorative street lighting, the replacement of aged infrastructure, installation of brick pavers, bump-outs, signage, landscaping and the creation of new public gathering places through street furniture and plazas. This project will also assist the Town by creating a complete streets plan which is in line with current and future pedestrian access conditions, in order to create a safe and pleasurable pedestrian experience. The concept behind the plan is to create a downtown that attracts people and businesses, instead of cars and traffic.

DOWNTOWN IDENTIFICATION

This section should be filled out with reference to the criteria set forth in the DRI Guidelines.

Answers to each question are limited to one page each.

- 1) **Boundaries of the Downtown Neighborhood.** Detail the boundaries of the targeted neighborhood, keeping in mind that there is no minimum or maximum size, but that the neighborhood should be compact and well-defined. Core neighborhoods beyond a traditional downtown or central business district are eligible, if they can meet other criteria making them ripe for investment.

The Harrison Central Business District encompasses the area between the intersection of Broadway and Halstead Avenue to the west, Orchard Street and Harrison Avenue to the north, Grant and Halstead Avenues to the east and Park Avenue and Harrison Avenue to the south.

- 2) **Size.** Outline why the downtown, or its catchment area, is of a size sufficient to support a vibrant, year-round downtown, with consideration of whether there is a sizeable existing, or increasing, population within easy reach for whom this would be the primary downtown.

Harrison's downtown is roughly 0.2 square miles, and consists of a solid mix of open space, commercial and residential uses, including an ongoing major transit-oriented development project. As proposed, the downtown will be transitioned from a solely transit-oriented area to a dynamic pedestrian-friendly center of place within an affluent and thriving highly residential town. As such, Downtown Harrison is strategically positioned to redefine how communities with no waterfront access can thrive in the 21st Century. With a population of 27,472 as of the 2010 United States Census, Harrison experienced a 13.7% increase in population from 2000 to 2010, and continues to support population growth in 2016 due to the implementation of new transit village oriented development. Harrison acts as the 326th most wealthy municipality in the United States, representing an affluent population which can ensure a significant boost to the long-term economic health of the downtown as a destination for residents and visitors alike.

- 3) **Past Investments & Future Investment Potential.** Describe how this downtown will be able to capitalize on prior, and catalyze future, private and public investment in the neighborhood and its surrounding areas.

Harrison's Downtown is strategically positioned to capitalize upon prior and future investment by removing a number of growth barriers which currently exist. As proposed, the Town seeks to implement new zoning ordinances which will support the growth of existing businesses and attract additional investments; create new centers of place to improve continuity throughout the downtown; create and implement an accessibility plan to link our private, public and cultural resources; and implement a variety of planned streetscape improvements. All of these improvements are intended to solve the following barriers to growth which currently exist within Harrison's Downtown.

Lack of Retail Variety:

Currently, retail uses are scattered within the CBD, mainly along Halstead Avenue with the largest concentration present in the Harrison Shopping Center on the corner of Halstead and Oakland Avenues. However, there is less of a retail presence than one would normally expect in a downtown. In general, the retail stores are small-scale, and cumulatively comprise a relatively small proportion of overall square footage for a downtown. Harrison would like to redefine the CBD to include a variety of shops, services and restaurants and other uses, with sufficient on-street and off-street parking that is sited in order to encourage shoppers to park their cars and walk the downtown area. This will help to increase foot traffic and therefore support the growth of local businesses and attraction of new businesses. This can easily be accomplished through the proposed actions, which will complement current mixed-use development projects underway adjacent to the train station. The new residential uses will help to ensure a 24-hour presence in the downtown that will complement the traffic and parking needs for the commercial uses. The Town seeks to increase and achieve this mix as a part of this downtown revitalization initiative.

Zoning Issues:

The Town's overriding goal for the future development of the CBD is to create an environment that fosters a wide mix of business types as well as residential uses. As referenced, at present, Harrison lacks variety in relation to the stores which call the CBD home. In fact, there are a number of longstanding vacancies in the core business area, several of which are highly visible and waiting for redevelopment. These vacancies include an old movie theater on Harrison Avenue and the former Harrison Sports Shop on Halstead Avenue. In addition, there are several vacant lots along Halstead Avenue – as well as the Metro-North parking lot – which act to break up the urban fabric and disrupt pedestrian continuity. As planned, the Town will utilize a zoning code regulations planning report to identify new policies which can attract a variety of businesses and capitalize upon the Town's high earning resident population.

Accessibility:

Harrison's Downtown currently lacks continuity and pedestrian accessibility in order to provide new linkages between numerous public facilities, the train station and commercial core along Halstead and Harrison Avenues. Public services offered in our downtown include our Veteran's Memorial Building, Community Center Complex, Recreation Center, Town Hall, Post Office and Library. All of these facilities are located adjacent to the train station and Ma Riis Park,

which is the proposed location of a new Harrison Town Green. These facilities would benefit from various accessibility upgrades and improvements designed to maximize their use and benefit to the community. Moreover, we currently lack any connection between these public facilities and the retail core along Halstead Avenue. Although there is a covered pedestrian walking bridge linking the commuter parking lot on Halstead Avenue across the tracks to Heineman Place, it is significantly underutilized and in need of enhancement. Existing connections are not readily visible and attractive, and do not attract consumer foot traffic from one side of the tracks to the other. The project will create a true civic center surrounding a town green and link our public facilities to Halstead Avenue and the surrounding neighborhoods.

Passive Recreation Place-making:

Fortunately, Harrison's Downtown is well served by its proximity to several parks. However, the downtown currently lacks an inviting, accessible public space in its center. The two main public spaces in the downtown core: Ma Riis Park and Amelia Earhart Park north of Halstead Avenue are separated from the rest of downtown by the railroad and not well linked to adjacent civic uses, while Jilly Flowers Park is isolated, surrounded by the railroad to the rear, parking lots to either side and Halstead Avenue to the front. As proposed, the implementation of our "Town Green" concept for Ma Riis Park will complement an ongoing Metro-North Transit Oriented Development project to offer an inviting, accessible and well-supervised open space to the public, in the interest of enhancing the entire downtown experience.

Housing:

To date, housing in Downtown Harrison has been mainly comprised of two-family residences. There are a few multifamily residential units along Halstead Avenue, one being Marion Court Condominiums in the west and Newport Towers in the east. There are also dwelling units over first-floor non-residential uses along Halstead and Harrison Avenues. However, residential presence within the downtown has been historically lacking. This will be solved by the addition of 142 new rental units adjacent to the train station, 36 new rental units at 550 Halstead Avenue and 42 new rental units at the new Harrison Playhouse Loft Complex. The addition of these 220 rental units will ensure that there is a 24 hour pedestrian presence to support the proposed enhancements to Downtown Harrison.

- 4) **Job Growth.** Describe how recent or impending job growth within, or in close proximity to, the downtown will attract professionals to an active life in the downtown, support redevelopment, and make growth sustainable in the long-term.

Harrison is currently experiencing a boom in downtown residential redevelopment. Due to its proximity to the train station, these residents are expected to be working professionals who will be seeking to live in a transit village which can easily provide for recreational, dining, cultural and retail experiences as a part of their day to day lives. All of these desires will create jobs within the downtown. Furthermore, Harrison includes to Purchase, New York, which is home to the corporate headquarters for international companies such as Mastercard, PepsiCo, Atlas Air and Central National-Gottesman. As the most localized central business district to all of these working professionals, Harrison seeks to redefine its ability to meet the needs of this population.

From a regional perspective, downtown Harrison competes with other downtown districts in east-central Westchester, such as the City of Rye and the villages of Mamaroneck and Port Chester. Because many of the goods and services offered in Harrison are available elsewhere, it is critical that the Town set its downtown apart from the others by establishing a strong sense of place. The proposed planning efforts and their resulting infrastructure improvements will create a multi-functional, pedestrian-friendly downtown to be enjoyed by thousands of new residents and visitors. Harrison's CBD will become distinct from the other commercial settings in neighboring communities by building upon its historic, economic, natural and cultural amenities to create a place of constant pedestrian activity, further fostering the sense of community in town. These efforts will create hundreds of project related jobs, and foster new investment in the community which will result in additional short and long term employment opportunities.

5) Attractiveness of the Downtown. Identify the properties or characteristics the downtown possesses that contribute or could contribute, if enhanced, to the attractiveness and livability of the downtown. Consider, for example, the presence of developable mixed-use spaces, housing at different levels of affordability and type, healthy and affordable food markets, walkability and bikeability, and public parks and gathering spaces.

As referenced above, the Town of Harrison believes that creating a more functional and pleasant streetscape is critical to fostering the development of the downtown. The Town has a number of existing assets which can be capitalized upon as a part of this effort. Redefining the downtown consists of two main endeavors, revitalizing/reconfiguring Halstead Avenue and increasing accessibility to the northern side of the Metro-North Railroad, which is home to numerous public facilities including town hall, the library, recreation center, parking lots and Ma Riis Park.

Halstead Avenue serves as Harrison's primary commercial thoroughfare and has some elements of a traditional "Main Street" character, particularly east of Harrison Avenue, with a relatively consistent row of early twentieth century buildings on the southern side. However, on the northern side of Halstead, the streetscape is interrupted by two parcels totaling about 3.5 acres, which contain the Metro-North train station commuter surface parking lots and a small area of public open space, known as Jilly Flowers Park.

The majority of Halstead Avenue contains commercial and mixed uses. For the most part, it consists of single commercial-use buildings which are one-story, with older buildings containing off-street parking in the rear and newer buildings having larger, landscaped parking areas. The mixed-use buildings, typically containing retail on the ground floor and residential apartment units above, range in height from two to four stories. Ground-floor commercial uses include bars, restaurants, dry cleaners, flower shops, law offices and similar uses.

In recent years the Town has undertaken some streetscape improvements, centered on Halstead Avenue, which included installing uniform historically styled light fixtures, consistent street furniture, curb extensions with canopy street trees, and striped crosswalks. The corridor is also home to numerous examples of buildings of architectural interest including Chase Bank, the fire station, the old train station, Marion Court condominiums, Veteran's Building and an old theater.

As a part of this project, Halstead Avenue would be repaved and re-curbed, and streetscapes will be improved from Halstead Avenue from Macy Road/Oakland Avenue to Broadway, Harrison Avenue from Park to Orchard Street and Halstead Avenue from Broadway to West Street. A preliminary streetscape design has been completed, but requires a re-review in order to complement current developments. New design guidelines for downtown Harrison will provide a final framework for residents and developers to work toward achieving a better built environment through adherence to fundamental design principles. The three objectives of final design will encourage innovative site planning and architectural design; provide flexibility in the application of development standards; and improve communication and participation among developers, neighbors and the Town early in the design and siting of new development.

Pedestrian improvements will incorporate brick pavers to make the sidewalks more distinctive, street trees, human-scale decorative lighting, unique signage, benches and plazas to provide new areas for pedestrians to experience a downtown with architectural character. This project will enhance visual linkages between sites of interest, protect the safety of pedestrians and adhere to policies which support creative design, building facades, landscaping and lighting concepts.

- 6) **Policies to Enhance Quality of Life.** Articulate the policies in place that increase the livability and quality of life of the downtown. Examples include the use of local land banks, modern zoning codes, complete streets plans, or transit-oriented development. If policies achieving this goal are not currently in place, describe the ability of the municipality to create and implement such policies.

The Town of Harrison seeks to increase quality of life in the downtown through a number of planning and implementation actions. These include a comprehensive review of existing zoning regulations and design policies including the creation of a complete streets plan, implementing the reuse of public facilities to complement ongoing transit-oriented development and a number of critical accessibility improvements.

Current zoning and design policies in downtown Harrison support a basic mix of commercial and residential uses. In total, there are a total of four business districts, within which the only residential development permitted is dwelling units over first-floor non-residential uses. The PB - Professional Business district is centered on the Town Hall and the train station, and allows for professional offices and office support services with limited retail activities and no restaurants. The CBD – Central Business District is located to the south of the rail line, along both Halstead and Harrison Avenues. This allows a variety of retail goods and services in the downtown. The NB – Neighborhood Business district is located on the east side of Harrison Avenue, south of Colonial Street stretching eastward as far as Soulard Street. This provides for retail businesses and services serving local needs. The fourth business district is the GC – General Commercial district, which provides for general retail businesses and services but excludes restaurants, and this is located in the far east of the CBD, along the south side of Osborn Street. However, this project seeks to further analyze the needs to continue the incorporation of four separate districts as a part of future growth.

The Town is also proposing the completion of a comprehensive zoning code regulations planning report in order to identify new zoning and design policies which will be necessary to enhance our downtown street network. Success will be dependent upon ensuring that the street network – the streets and blocks that comprise the downtown – remains intact, while creating a

clear difference in character among various key streets. It will be important to understand each street's role in establishing the built environment of downtown, and how secondary streets will play a supporting role to Halstead Avenue, the "Main Street" of downtown.

In relation to urban design, Harrison's downtown currently offers very little difference in terms of form and scale between Halstead Avenue and its connecting streets. As a result, this project seeks to promote the continued development of higher densities along Halstead Avenue in a manner which increases the walkability and bike-ability of the downtown district. This, coupled with the formulation of a complete streets plan, will ensure continuity as a part of all actions taken towards the goal of revitalization. Currently, much of Halstead Avenue is significantly underutilized, with a number of one- and two-story buildings where four stories are permitted, and strategic corners that should contain signature buildings to create a sense of place containing minor structures instead. The increase in density along Halstead Avenue will be accompanied by building design guidelines or form-based regulations to strengthen the pedestrian experience and control for architectural quality. The resulting zoning and design regulations will provide the town with greater control over future uses of new mixed-use development.

- 7) **Local Support.** Set forth the local and community support that exists for the revitalization of this downtown and the commitment among local leaders and stakeholders to building and implementing a strategic investment plan. Identify an initial local lead for the program that will work with outside experts to convene a local DRI Planning Committee to oversee the plan.

The Town of Harrison has made a point to create a wide-ranging network of supports for all downtown revitalization initiatives, including the projects laid-forth within this proposal. This proposal has the full support of the Harrison Town Board, the local business community, the MTA, Harrison Beautification Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Harrison Revitalization Committee and community at-large. Moreover, all of the proposed projects were outlined within the Town's updated Master Plan in 2013 as recommended next steps for the revitalization of the downtown. The Town of Harrison already maintains a Downtown Revitalization Committee which is headed by Mayor Ron Belmont, and meets every two weeks. The goal of the committee is to continue setting in motion a series of realistic goals that will reform the downtown business district. The committee is comprised of members of the Town's governing body, business community and public at large.

- 8) **Other.** Provide any other information that informed the nomination of this downtown for a DRI award.

The Town of Harrison is committed to creating a unique and dynamic downtown experience for residents and visitors. If awarded, this project will complement three ongoing projects including those located at 550 Halstead Avenue (36 Rental Units, 45 Off-Street Parking Spaces, Associated Infrastructure Improvements), Harrison's Transit-Oriented Development Project in partnership with Metro-North (136 Market-Rate Rental Units, 7 Affordable Work Force Rentals, 27,000 Square Feet of Retail Space, 769 Parking Spaces, Courtyards and Plazas, Landscaping, Associated Infrastructure Improvements), and the Harrison Playhouse Lofts (42 Rental Units, 52 Off-Street Parking Spaces, Associated Infrastructure Improvements).